



**THE NEXT GENERATION:
IMPROVING SCOPE and FOCUS of THE EDUCATION
and WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT SYSTEMS for ALL**

SUGGESTIONS FOR STRENGTHENING WORKFORCE INVESTMENT ACT

**LESSONS LEARNED BY THE
CENTER FOR WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT
INSTITUTE FOR EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP**

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INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Educational Leadership (IEL), a nonprofit organization dedicated to building the capacity of individuals and organization in education and related fields to work together – across policies, programs and sectors – submits these observations and recommendations around improving the legislative framework for the Workforce Investment Act. IEL houses the National Collaborative on Workforce and Disability for Youth (NCWD/Youth), the national Technical Assistance Center, supported by ODEP, on issues related to improving transition outcomes for youth with disabilities. The approach we take to our work is to focus on all youth, with a particular emphasis on youth with disabilities.

These recommendations reflect the opinions of the leadership at IEL and build upon our prior professional experiences at the local, state, and national levels of government. Our recommendations also reflect knowledge we have gained through our work with other youth-focused organizations, such as the Campaign for Youth, the National Youth Employment Coalition, the Collaboration to Promote Self-Determination, and the Consortium for Citizen with Disabilities. We have also worked closely with many subject experts across the workforce system, including individuals with expertise around specific populations. Several members of the research community were specifically consulted as well. Our recommendations are predicated on six broad strategies for improving the WIA system. These strategies include:

1. The legislation should be written based on what *all* youth need to succeed in the labor force yet allowing for the extra supports the most vulnerable populations need to achieve such success.
2. Mechanisms and incentives need to be built into the WIA to increase *collaboration* across the key institutions charged with assisting youth in the initial preparation for the world of work.
3. A substantial need exists to *strengthen and align the infrastructure across all titles* in the WIA and related legislation. This is also a collaboration issue but is separated out due to its importance. Some have called these the back-office functions.
4. The WIA needs to be designed and driven by use and expansion of *evidence-based research*. A research agenda needs to be aggressively developed and pursued that centers

on the development of a world-class workforce development system that includes substantial attention to increasing the labor market participation of all vulnerable populations including persons with disabilities.

5. *Promoting continuous improvement* in the design and delivery of services should be a key goal for implementation in the new legislation. This means the accountability and performance measures must be revamped and a refined and collaborative federal infrastructure needs to be developed.
6. *Recognizing the dependence on knowledge and skills of the providers of services.* Currently professional development is treated—at best—marginally and without strategic focus to improve the workforce development system of the nation.

While these recommendations are WIA specific they are provided with an assumption that as other reauthorizations occur appropriate changes will be made in them to promote the eventual establishment of a functioning workforce development system (e.g. Career and Technical Education, IDEA, ESEA, TANF, and the Higher Education Opportunity Act). Additionally the recommendations are written on the recognition that it is the WIA law that sets forth the primary federal intergovernmental governance framework for the nation's workforce development system by setting forth core goals and service strategies, as well as the research, accountability and performance underpinnings required to support the infrastructure that binds together the vast array of institutions and governmental agencies.

The recommendations are also designed to be sensitive to the responsibilities of state and local governments as both contribute significant resources (fiscal and human) that are larger than the federal contributions yet federal laws have the advantage of setting forth national goals and providing the tools to promote the development of a cohesive workforce development system. It is the lack of a cohesive workforce development system that contributes major impediments for youth with disabilities to gain the necessary opportunities to become successful in the labor force.

PROPOSED AMENDMENTS

1) DEFINITIONS

Common language is missing that tie the different parts of the workforce development system together. Yet common language can substantially enhance collaboration among the

complex array of stakeholders that make up the workforce development system. Additionally the same definitions used across multiple Acts, including Titles within Acts, provide guidance to the field for use in planning, reporting and measuring progress. It is recognized some definitions must be Title specific but located in one place should be terms applicable across all WIA titles as they have been found to have hindered collaboration and assessing quality of services. Using this approach some definitions would be moved from other Titles into Title I Chapter 1, Section 101 since that is the place where the framework outlining the whole system is set forth. What follows are possible definitions, many of which are the result of the IEL's search for commonly used terms/concepts that have been placed in a Glossary available on the website NCWD-YOUTH.info.

- *Blended Funding*: A term used to describe mechanisms that pool dollars from multiple sources and make them in some ways indistinguishable. Blending may require the changing or relaxing of regulations guiding relevant state and federal funding streams by policy makers at the federal, state, or local level to permit program flexibility, and change the way services are structured and delivered.
- *Braided Funding*: A funding and resource allocation strategy that taps into existing categorical funding streams and uses them to support unified initiatives in as flexible and integrated manner as possible. Braided funding streams remain visible and are used in common to produce greater strength, efficiency, and; or effectiveness. Braided funding allows resources to be tracked more closely for the purpose of accounting to state and federal administrators. Thus, implementing a braided funding approach requires significant attention be paid to administrative issues.
- *Career Guidance*: Services and activities intended to assist individuals, of any age and at any point throughout their lives, to make educational, training and occupational choices and to manage their careers. Such services may be found in schools, universities and colleges, in training institutions, in public employment services, in the workplace, in the voluntary or community sector and in the private sector. The activities may take place on an individual or group basis, and may be face-to-face or at a distance. They include career information provisions, assessment tools, counseling interviews, career education programs, job search programs, and transition services. Source: the Organization of Economic Co-Operation and

Development. Adapted from Career Guidance: A Handbook for Policy Makers:

<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/53/53/34060761.pdf>

- *Informed Choice*: The process by which an individual arrives at a decision. It is a process that is based upon access to, and full understanding of, all necessary information from the individual's perspective. The process should result in a free and informed decision by the individual about what he or she needs.
- *Infrastructure* includes the processes that multiple stakeholders use in the design and delivery of services, managerial and accountability processes, IT, and other support systems such as the development of standards-based materials including organization of career pathways, industry based credentials and assessments to promote continuous improvement to meet the needs of the primary clients/customers.
- *Transition Services*: (MOVED from Title IV) A coordinated set of activities for a student/youth, designed within an outcome oriented process that promotes movement from school to post school activities, including postsecondary education, vocational training, integrated employment (including supported employment), continuing and adult education, adult services, independent living, or community participation. The coordinated set of activities shall be based upon the individual youth's needs, taking into account the preferences and interests, and shall include instruction, community experiences, the development of employment and other post school adult living objectives including career exposure and work-based learning experiences, and, when appropriate, acquisition of daily living skills and functional vocational evaluation.
- *Universal Design*: The design of environments, products, and communication practices, as well as the delivery of programs, services, and activities, to be usable by all people to the greatest extent possible without adaptation or specialized design.
- *Universal Design for Learning*: A scientifically valid framework for guiding educational practice that—(A) provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and,(B) reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient. (This is definition used in recently enacted Higher Education Act Amendments

- *Universal Design for the Workforce Development System:* The design of environments, products, and communication practices as well as the delivery of programs, services, and activities to meet the needs of all customers of the workforce development system.
- *Workforce Development System:* encompasses organizations at the national, state, and local levels that have direct responsibility for planning, allocating resources (both public and private), providing administrative oversight and operating programs to assist individuals and employers in obtaining education, training, job placement, and job recruitment. Included in this broad network are several federal agencies charged with providing specific education and/or training support and other labor market services such as labor market information. At the state and local levels the network includes state and local workforce investment boards, state and local career and technical education and adult education agencies, vocational rehabilitation agencies, recognized apprenticeship programs, state employment and unemployment services agencies, state and local welfare agencies, and/or sub-units of these entities. A wide array of organizations provide direct education, training, or employment services (e.g. technical schools, colleges, and universities, vocational rehabilitation centers, apprenticeship programs community based organizations, one-stop centers, welfare to work training programs, literacy programs, Job Corp Centers, unions, and labor/management programs).

This list is but a beginning, other cross cutting terms *applicable to all* Titles such a alternative schools, career development, career pathways, competitive employment, financial literacy, industry recognized credentials, and self-determination are all candidates for inclusion in a common definition section.

Update: Two specific request for additional definitions were made during

Financial Literacy: understanding how to manage money, use credit, work with a bank and generally be able to function financially as an adult in society. (Sources Networks Financial Institute and 360 Degrees American Institute of CPA's)

Alternative Education: Institutions empowered by the state to award education credentials through multiple pathways to acquire the credential and offer competency-based and applied learning approaches including work-based learning, career preparation, internships and other opportunities to help prepare youth for paid employment in the 21st century workplace

2) STATE and LOCAL PLANNING SECTIONS

Across the country there is a growing recognition that for the nation to ensure a strong economic base in the future it is essential there be a substantial increase in the numbers of young people graduating from high school prepared for post secondary education and the workplace. The President's American Graduation Initiative sets forth the goal of having all youth acquire at a minimum at least one year of post secondary education. Yet, even though the economic imperative has been well documented for such an initiative there is substantial evidence that in order to meet even this relative modest goal an unparalleled range of coordinated efforts must occur among multiple federal and state agencies and numerous local organizations to develop supports to assist a wide range of vulnerable youth to become a part of an work-ready, well educated labor force.

There have been multiple pilot projects supported by several federal agencies and some foundations over the past three decades attempting to improve the one or more parts of the transition process for the 14-24 age group but to date the results are not stellar (The last Administration issued a report of a White House Task Force on Disadvantaged Youth documenting this disarray). A good portion of the problem rests with institutional barriers – and not with the youth themselves. In order to address the institutional/cross systems boundary issues it is recommended a Transitional Plan be required that encourages and rewards collaboration among agencies that have responsibility for working with this age group. A two prong strategy is suggested based on a state options approach – not a federal mandate. ETA took the lead among several federal agencies to establish an under-resourced but important effort called the Shared Youth Vision Initiative to promote development of joint efforts across systems that was well received among the states. This recommendation builds upon that work as well lessons prior demonstration projects supported by the Office of Special Education, ODEP, and others.

The OPTION PLAN: A Transition Plan (I) developed as a part of the state workforce development plan to:

- focus on an age range determined by the state but at a minimum address the needs of those 14 to 24 to promote collaboration across the multiple agencies involved with this age group.
- address but not be limited to:

- Developing the capacity to share data across systems to better serve youth;
 - Developing a transparent family friendly information and referral service to assist parents as they help youth in the transition process including access to information about employment, further education, and community resources;
 - Developing integrated approaches to the delivery of basic skills, career exploration and preparation, work exposure and work experience; youth development, leadership, and mentoring opportunities; and
 - Promoting strong connection mechanisms to mental and physical health services, transportation, financial support, and housing assistance.
- The plan should include:
 - how the total population in this age group will be provided the opportunity to prepare for careers of their choice;
 - how the involvement of State agencies, especially those responsible for foster care, juvenile justice, health, mental health, developmental disability organizations, conservation corps and other service organizations, and after school programs along with the secondary and post secondary workforce development agencies will contribute to the transition plan; and,
 - how case management and navigation services between and among the different systems will be promoted and financed for the vulnerable populations.

The Plan would need to show how appropriate state officials from the agencies responsible for supporting all youth were involved. It may be prudent to allow states to “opt in” to the comprehensive approach over a number of years. Included in the Option Plan would be a requirement to address WIA specific issues under the *Transition Plan (II)*.

Transition Plan (II) WIA centered only: For states opting not to develop the more comprehensive plan it would only address Transition Plans for the youth eligible under all Titles of WIA. This plan should detail how it will ensure that local workforce areas collaborate across youth serving agencies, organizations and institutions for the purpose of delivering a coordinated, continuum of comprehensive services to youth ages 14 -24, particularly with respect to the most vulnerable youth.

Local Plans

New language needs to be added to the local plan section describing how joint/comprehensive planning has occurred that identifies its specific priority populations that are most in need of assistance by social/demographic statistics including homeless youth, foster care youth, juvenile justices, native American, and youth with disabilities. For each population of youth, the local plan should identify the approach that it will take to ensure that local WIA youth service providers develop integrated service plans that reflect the multiple providers of services across agencies, organizations and institutions.

In both Plans the state and localities would need to describe how resources will be either blended or braided together to provide the services. Also see Section 6 for other issues that should be incorporated in the State Plan.

If states, in concert with their localities opted for *Transition Plan (I)* outlining how resources from multiple funding sources would be used the state and local communities would be rewarded via a modest Incentive Fund. There are several ways the Incentive Fund could work. One approach could be implemented without legislative changes: the federal government could include in the scoring for discretionary programs bonus points for collaboration efforts. Another approach could be based on some formula that includes rewards for evidence of serving the most vulnerable populations (e.g. persons with significant disabilities, emotional behavior challenges, wards of the state). Yet another approach or combined with serving the most vulnerable could include bonuses for achieving progress measures based on success of the most vulnerable populations.

3) CHAPTER 4 YOUTH ACTIVITIES

There are three key areas indentified through the work of the Collaborative that merit alterations in this Chapter.

1. In order to reduce the impediments related to income eligibility youth with disabilities should be treated as a highly vulnerable population across all funding streams and no income eligibility should be required. Unfortunately statistics bear this out. (Statistics can be provided upon request.)
2. A separate funding stream for summer youth programs has considerable merit for all vulnerable youth, especially if linked with other year-round support programs.

Research shows that youth with disabilities who have had opportunities for work as teenagers are more likely than their peers to go on to post secondary education and participate in the competitive labor force. Unfortunately too few are provided the opportunity to do so. (Statistics can be provided upon request.)

3. SECTION 129, specifically the PROGRAM DESIGN and PROGRAM ELEMENTS needs to be modified. As written they do not promote a goal driven framework upon which to build an evidence -based workforce development agenda for youth. What follows is suggestive language to refine these two important allowable activities sections.

For the PROGRAM DESIGN section the following drivers should be considered:

1. Competitive employment and economic self sufficiency (which may include adaptive supports) is the goal for all participants;
2. Programs are organized to support youth learn self-determination skills and the capacity for them to make informed career choices;
3. Individualized, person-driven, and culturally and linguistically appropriate transition planning is provided to all youth;
4. Learning environments that are small and safe, including extra supports such as tutoring and mentoring, are provided;
5. Curricular and program options are based on universal design of school, work, and community-based learning experiences;
6. Structured and traceable connections are made with other organizations to support the needs of youth requiring mental and physical health services, transportation, housing, tutoring, financial planning and management, post-program supports through structured arrangements in postsecondary institutions and adult service agencies; and connection to other services and opportunities (e.g. recreation); and,
7. Supports are provided from and by highly qualified staff.

PROGRAM ELEMENTS

The following elements shall be required in all programs:

1. Career assessments to help identify a youth's school and post-school preferences and interests;
2. Structured exposure to postsecondary education and other life-long learning opportunities;

3. Exposure to career opportunities that ultimately lead to a living wage, including information about educational requirements, entry requirements, income and benefits potential, and asset accumulation; and
4. Training designed to improve job-seeking skills and work-place basic skills (sometimes called “soft skills”).

It is recognized there are multiple approaches and pathways that can be used to provide the required elements. Yet the needs of youth will vary by age, experiences, family and socio-economic conditions, and for some academic status. Based on individualized goals of the youth funds can be used to:

1. Participate in academic preparation programs leading to acquisition of educational credits;
2. Participate in a range of work-based exploration activities such as site visits and job shadowing, multiple on-the-job training experiences (paid or unpaid), including community service, linked to the content of a program of study in a career pathway recognized by industry;
3. Participation in mentoring programs;
4. Developing skills that promote independence as an adult in goal setting, self-advocacy, conflict resolution, and financial literacy.

4) ACCOUNTABILITY and PERFORMANCE

Too many stakeholder groups performance measures are considered punitive, “they generate a gotcha mentality,” and folks in the field want to know “for what purpose is the data needed.” Distrust and/or dislike exist. Yet, there is recognition of the value—not just the inevitably—of having accountability systems within the intergovernmental system. While the power of accountability systems are recognized, there is growing recognition the full benefit of the systems cannot be realized because the current narrow range of measurements used is inadequate to inform practitioners and policy makers alike about what are the most effective and efficient practices.

The current performance measures create disincentives to serve those persons with the most barriers—especially youth and adults with disabilities—even though supporting individuals with the highest barriers is a core purpose of federal education and workforce development

legislation. The current approaches impede rather than encourage collaboration across parts of the system due to incompatibilities embedded in legislation (e.g., confusing and variable definitions, incompatible and inefficient management information systems, and clashing performance criteria for different programs).

The next generation of accountability systems need to be built based on constructing the capacity to promote collaboration among all stakeholders and continuous improvement throughout all levels of the system. The development of this next generation of accountability will require experimentation to test new measures and methods of collection so legislation should be written to guide but not dictate rigid indicators or measurements.

- Federal legislation should establish the general parameters of accountability system(s) with three prongs:
 - The first to identify the core issues that need to be addressed in an accountability system but not the precise measures (see below).
 - The second to support the development of the platforms to meet the accountability needs of state and local governments, specific programs and direct service institutions/ providers and clients.
 - The third prong would be to invest in the development of tools needed to measure effects (e.g., assessments including academic and work-based competencies).
- Consideration should be given to charging the Federal Departments of Labor and Education and perhaps other Departments such as Health and Human Services including the Social Security Administration to establish a National Advisory Panel composed of representatives of key stakeholder groups and assessment and measurement experts to advise the Secretaries on the development of measures that document the progress of individuals as well as measures to judge the efficacy of individual programs and sub-systems.
- The allowable activities in the various titles/programs in all the laws should be used to develop the check list for use in the development of measures and metrics for (a) individual client outcomes, (b) individual progress, (c) program design and system improvement; and, (d) informing professional development strategies; use of common definitions across all the various legislation should occur to the maximum extent possible

(e.g., career guidance, self sufficiency, purpose and forms of assessments, professional development, etc.). In other words, if something is important to be considered an allowable activity it should be considered important enough to be addressed as a part of the continuous improvement agenda.

- All reporting should be based on the use of common target population categories for reporting results (i.e. building upon the ESEA sub-populations base approach).
- Changes, at a minimum would be necessary in Title 1 Chapter 6 General Provisions, SEC 136, Title II Chapter 1 Sec 212 and Title V Sec 502 for Rehabilitation Services and other references as necessary in ESEA, Perkins, IDEA, etc.

5) PROMOTING INNOVATION, RESEARCH, and EVALUATION (This would probably require a new section in legislation perhaps in Title 1 Subtitle D National Programs).

One of the key functions of our federal government has been supporting innovation and development through the support of research and development. A major strategy employed in various parts of the federal government to promote such efforts has been the establishment of Institutes whose charters cross boundaries of Departments. What does not exist is a mechanism that ties the innovations, research and evaluation pieces together within the overall workforce development system.

Even in the current WIA law there is inadequate linkages in this area. While each of the separate Titles and many of the sub-sections of WIA have a section centered on research and evaluation with the most formal contained in Titles II (National Institute for Literacy) and IV (National Institute on Disability and Rehabilitation Research that does have a larger mission than workforce issues that will need to be addressed) but there are no mechanisms to connect the dots within the law or to easily combine with I, R/D/Efforts with other workforce development laws (e.g., Perkins, IDEA, TANF, America Competes and others).

There needs to be created a national structure –a Workforce Development Institute – something similar to the U.S. Department of Education’s Institute of Education Sciences. Its purview should at a minimum address issues embedded in all Titles of the next generation of workforce development legislation, not just WIA funded programs. An efficient mechanism for transferring funds between various federal agencies seeking collaboration to support research and demonstration should be incorporated within all the laws.

As noted in the introduction several leading researchers were consulted to help refine and sharpen this specific recommendation. What follows in this paper is a substantial upgrade from the original draft due to their input. They all shared common concerns, many of which have been noted in GAO reports that have regarding the topics embedded in this section. Strong expressions about the need to generate a structure that ensured a reasonable level of independence that would guarantee research and evaluation findings would not be tampered with for political purposes. All also noted the importance of ensuring highly qualified professionals in research and evaluation were at the helm in all key positions and a hope was expressed that Institute would also be a home that helps prepare the next generation of scholars in the field.

The Institute should house several Centers that cluster common issues applicable across sub-systems that make up the overall workforce development system and address both supply and demand issues. All of the proposed Centers work should inform the development of a more transparent and seamless workforce development system including accountability systems that meet the needs of all stakeholders.

There are some overarching issues “rules of engagement” that need to be incorporated in all Centers:

- A requirement that any organization involved in researching and evaluating any initiatives, should include efforts to collect information on all of the sub-groups that are generally recognized as being at risk (i.e. the NCLB categories) This should help correct a problem that in far too many “gold standard” studies efforts to identify persons with disabilities did not occur though it is now well documented they are overrepresented in all the at risk groups.
- A process to establish the priorities based on the needs of key stakeholders (e.g., states, localities, and providers) that inform continuous improvement in program design as well as processes to promote scaling up of promising practices.
- Field trails should be a strategy employed by all of the Centers
- A common dissemination approach should be employed to share “what works” findings targeted to the key stakeholder groups --from consumers, front line practitioners through elected policy makers.

Due to the fact this recommendation calls for multiple Departments and Agencies of the federal government to be partners to support this Institute particular attention needs to be given

to structuring organizational linkages that meet simultaneously recognizes the interdependence among them while respecting the legitimacy of their specific charters. To do so, possible strategies include the following:

- Appoint a Board of Advisors nominated by President and confirmed by the Senate based on lists generated through consultation with all relevant Secretaries and Commissioners to provide technical advice to the Director of the Institute that would be appointed by President for a specified term and confirmed by the Senate.
- Among the Director responsibilities would be establishing the standards of practice for the various types of research conducted by Centers and appointment of Center Directors.
- The head of the Institute could provide staff support to an interagency advisory body composed of representatives of the agencies appointed leadership to ensure the priorities of each were addressed. Additionally the individual agencies could be tasked with soliciting input from their primary constituents (e.g. state and local officials and stakeholder groups) on a periodic basis to ensure the work being done is relevant to their needs. These same agency representatives could also be tasked with appointing representatives to participate in technical committees for each of the individual Centers.

The proposed Centers include:

- *Center for Basic Research and Longitudinal Studies*: Studies to document the return on investment of receiving services over time with a specific emphasis on tracking participation of the most vulnerable populations would be a major emphasis. Also this Center would have the lead responsibility to support studies in a variety of areas to assess demographic, migration, and economic patterns affecting labor markets.
- *Center for Study of the Needs of Industry Sectors*: This Center would address the relationships and supports needed to ensure all industry sectors and their sub-sectors workforce development needs are addressed in order to answer such questions as: what are the most efficient and effective sector based strategies? What are common needs across all sectors? Can more effective processes be established to encourage cross sectors training and at which level of government needs to be responsible for promoting sector based planning and delivery? Does more economic growth occur when there is alignment

between workforce development and economic development systems? If so what are the promising practices?

- *Center for Study and Support of a Skilled Workforce:* This Center would study how to promote the development and use of competency standards based on the validated needs of industry utilizing a career pathways approach to build a stackable system that moves from entry to mastery. It would address how to assess and measure the acquisition of skills for our multiple and diverse populations. It would seek answers to such questions as do industry –based certification programs contribute added value for employers? Do they increase the productivity of the workforce? How are crucial skills most effectively learned? It would support the development of competency standards and assessment tools through cost effective and efficient approaches including partnerships with states and the private sector.
- *Center for Career Development and Guidance:* This Center would focus on potential, new, and current members of the workforce. The overarching issue it would address is what supports individuals need to make informed decisions about their own career paths in order for them to take control of the process. It would seek answers to what are the most cost effective tools and strategies to help individuals make career choices? Attention would be given to addressing age appropriate (i.e. differentiating needs of youth vs. adults; vulnerable populations such as disconnected youth, persons with disabilities, English language learners and others identified as priority groups in the various workforce development laws)
- *Center for Program and System Improvement and Accountability:* This Center would emphasize strengthening the capacity of institutions providing workforce development services. Emphasis would be on developing and testing different forms of progress and interim measures in various institutional settings to assess the most efficacious ways to measure progress of individual clients as well as identify the most effective tools to improve the overall system. This includes supporting the development of measures to assess the quality of services that improve: (1) the specific programs such as literacy development; (2) delivery modalities such as distant learning; (3) collaboration approaches through blending and braiding of funding to meet the needs of specific populations; (4) identifying effective program design and core element features that

promote quality service strategies that work best based on such factors as age, stage of development, labor market experience, culture of individuals and other factors effecting program design such as need for wrap around services; (5) indentifying the most effective and efficient practices and strategies for the delivery of core “foundation service” that need to be universally available for and accessible in any workforce development program i.e., career guidance and counseling and job placement processes; (6) assessing the professional development needs of workforce development provider community and promoting the development career pathways in the workforce development system.

6) STRENGTHEN AND ALIGN THE INFRASTRUCTURE

In order to strengthen collaboration across multiple agencies it is important to improve the sharing of information that meets the needs of clients, service organizations, local governing bodies, multiple state agencies, as well federal overseers. Substantial investments need to be made to improve IT systems – akin to the efforts now underway to improve medical records. It is not in the self-interest of a single organization at the federal or state level to bear the full burden of development and maintenance of such systems.

A suggested definition is in order: The infrastructure includes the processes the multiple stakeholders use in the design and delivery of services, the managerial and accountability processes, it could include the training of personnel the utilization of human resources, the IT and other support systems such as development of standards based materials including assessments to promote continuous improvement to meet the needs of the primary clients/customers.

The Federal legislation pattern of providing state set asides for administrative purposes is a well established approach and one that could be emulated to support a wide range of infrastructure tasks. There is historical precedence for this strategy through the CETA and JTPA funded support for State Occupational Information Coordinating Committees (SOICC) that had the task of improving occupational supply and demand information for use throughout the workforce development system—one of the first cross-cutting efforts to ensure wise use of scarce resources. The funds for the SOICC were not a part of capped set aside administrative category nor should they be for the infrastructure activities (see Accountability and Professional Development discussions as well). Such a charter could include many of the same functions of

the NOICC/SOICC network as well as addressing data quality issues, assist in the development of common definitions, be a clearinghouse for industry recognized credentials that meet the needs of both Education and Labor funded programs, supporting development of distance learning, and assessment activities in the states. Examples of tasks to be included in such a refined system are:

- Developing standards and assessments for use by organizations to document progress and competency attainment for the awarding of certificates by any workforce development program regardless of the setting has value for all organizations;
- Providing a national clearinghouse of validated career pathway standards and certification programs;
- Providing career guidance information that is easily accessible in multiple settings and institutions is another shared value set of products;

States need to be key actors in the development of all of the aforementioned infrastructure products and services. There appears to be growing agreement among key stakeholders about the feasibility and desirability of having a separate strand of funds to finance the infrastructure from that of service and administrative funds intended to directly support services. Such a demarcation recognizes multiple agencies need to support many of the infrastructure activities and it is difficult to mix funds attached to services specifically authorized in separate Titles of laws.

Whatever the results may be regarding, the financing structure of the *State Plans* should include an explanation of what organizational arrangements were developed and how the state will address the development and implementation of the infrastructure to meet the needs of stakeholders within the state.

- Possible functions could include: data collection, analysis, dissemination, translation of credentials across systems, cross cutting professional development, and translation of evidence-based practices across systems.
- Developing forms of interoperability and promotion of cross silo data analysis and more integrative analysis across programs is crucial. Documentation could be required showing how the stakeholders were involved in the development as well as their “satisfaction” with the results, and some form of documentation about the use of the quality assurance tools developed to meet their needs is necessary.

Another form of strengthening the infrastructure centers on the federal government developing a more strategic approach for providing technical assistance to the field. Several agencies support a variety of national TA Centers or provide support to the field through cooperative agreements with membership associations. Whatever the priorities may be for such TA support an emphasis on collaboration, identification and dissemination of evidence-based practices, promotion of professional development support needs to be included in the charters of those Centers. Additionally the establishment of some form of collaboration among the Centers themselves should be considered.

7) PROMOTE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT (This requires a new section in legislation).

The professional competencies of the staff of workforce development organizations represents one of the most important, if not the most important, part of the infrastructure. The significant emphasis on the part of the federal government to support the development of highly qualified teachers is laudable and essential, yet nothing comparable exists for the workforce development system. Within WIA only Title IV even contains a reference to professional development. This lack of support may well be a major contributor to the nation's incapacity to ensure a world class workforce development system.

Professional associations representing specific parts of the workforce development system have responded to the call from their members for professional development opportunities (e.g., school counselors, organizations servicing out of school youth and after school programs, workforce development professionals housed in One-Stops and Employment Service Centers, and vocational rehabilitation counselors) but their efforts are hampered by lack of fiscal support. A few states have passed legislation requiring professionals in some workforce development organizations to show evidence of competencies by passage of tests or acquisition of certificates but remain soloed. However there is paucity of information about both pre-service and in-service opportunities.

- A national office or task force should be designated to focus on supporting professional development activities for persons in leadership, administrative, and front line provider positions within the workforce development system.

- A base line study of the state of professional development should be conducted that includes analysis of both the pre-service and in-service sources of training including the content of the various curricula. The study should include an analysis of the supply and demand for workers in the field – broadly defined. Wide consultation with associations representing the different stakeholders should occur and a report to Congress should be made.
- A dedicated funding source should be included in the national accounts of the WIA for professional development, including for youth service professionals.